

A BASIC CONSULTING TOOLS READING LIST

If you want to start with three books, buy: Process Consultation Revisited: Building the Helping Relationship, The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization, and The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations.

James L. Adams, Conceptual Blockbusting: A Guide to Better Ideas (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1986)

Personal and organizational mental blocks impede flexibility and creativity. Adams prevents a number of exercises, checklists, and concepts to unfreeze mental blocks.

Chris Argyris, Strategy, Change and Defensive Routines (Marshfield, MA: Pitman Publishing, 1985)

Argyris is never an easy read. This out of print work describes his Theories of Action concept: Espoused Theory and Theory In Use. He provides a number of examples of two column discussions and how the tool can be used to deal with defensive routines.

Peter Block, Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used (San Diego: Pfeiffer & Co., 1981)

Even though this book was written in 1981, it is as relevant today as it ever was, perhaps more so. Block emphasizes authenticity as the key to effective consulting. He offers the readers sound advice, techniques, and checklists for making each consultation as effective and efficient as possible, i.e., “flawless.” The book is easy to read and practical. One of the best features is the attention it gives to the special needs of “internal” consultants.

Raymon Bruce & Sherman Wyman, Changing Organizations: Practicing Action Training and Research (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998)

Neely Gardner was a pioneer in changing hierarchical structured public organizations by introducing the Action Training and Research method of organizational development. This work is based on Gardner’s notebooks. The author’s describe in detail how to function as an internal organizational change and development agent. The articles mix case studies with descriptions of the problem encountered at the underlying theoretical and explicit levels.

Peter Cockman, Bill Evans, and Peter Reynolds, Client-Centered Consulting: Getting Your Expertise Used When You’re Not in Charge, (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1996)

Unlike other books that emphasize the business aspect of growing a consultancy, this guide focuses on the “people side” of a successful consulting engagement. It provides a step-by-step how to consult with any client sensitively and with political savvy through all stages of the consulting process, from contracting and collecting data, through implementing the solution and evaluating the results. It provides checklists, group

activities, exercises, and feedback instruments; to insure their advice and counsel is implemented fast and effortlessly.

Carsten de Dreu and Evert Van de Vliert, editors, Using Conflict in Organizations (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997)

Most people avoid conflict. Affective conflict is destructive. Cognitive conflict can enhance individual achievement, the quality of group decisions, organizational development, and organizational productivity. The chapter on “Mitigating

Linda Ellinor and Glenna Gerard, Dialogue: Rediscovering the Transforming Power of Conversations (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998)

We all know people who we talk to about those really important issues. We can anticipate how those people will respond to the issues we raise; we know how they will answer many questions. Dialogues with those people are structurally, emotionally, and cognitively different than the discussions we have with others. The authors describe those differences and create a framework to introduce dialogue into the workplace as a powerful tool to create a deeper understanding in work groups and to uncover underlying assumptions. This book will remain the most important work on this concept until later in 1999 when William Isaacs’ Dialogue is published.

Dalmar Fisher and William R. Tolbert, Personal and Organizational Transformations: The True Challenge of Continual Quality Improvement (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995)

The authors argue that TQM/CQI can succeed only if individuals repeatedly change their personal way of learning, understanding and acting. They provide a number of case studies exploring action inquiry, how to use personal power to create positive reactions to quality, and approaches to personal transformation.

Judith A. Hale, The Performance Consultant’s Fieldbook: Tools and Techniques for Improving Organizations and People, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998)

Judith Hale portrays the potentially overwhelming complexity that is characteristic of effectiveness in assessing human performance levels, diagnosing prevailing barriers to higher levels of performance, and designing and delivering “whole system” interventions that can achieve the desired improvements. Many of the tools and techniques are available as WORD documents on a disk that is included in the book.

James M. Higgins, 101 Problem Solving Techniques: The Handbook of New Business Ideas (Winter Park, Florida: New Management Publishing Co., 1994)

Higgins introduces the reader to a wide variety of problem solving techniques. The book's weakness lies in its rather superficial description of the technique without explaining the underlying theory. The best way to use the book seems to be as a “competency checklist.” Which tools have you seen in use? Which tools have you used successfully? Which tools do you need to experiment in a small safe work setting?

Robert W. Keidel, Seeing Organizational Patterns: A New Theory and Language of Organizational Design (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1995)

Keidel describes all organizational structures as an attempt to integrate three general themes: cooperation, control, and autonomy. Although the book deals directly with organizational design, it provides a useful triadic framework to understand individual behavior in groups.

Gareth Morgan, Imaginization: New Mindsets for Seeing, Organizing, and Managing (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1997)

Think of your organization redesigned as a spider plant. What does the spider plant tell us about the autonomy of business units? How would they communicate? Who is in charge?

Morgan uses metaphors to look at underlying assumptions of organization structure, power, control, and communications. His approach allows individuals to put aside rigid mental models and look at organizations in new ways. His examples are easily transferable to most management situations. Most importantly, his approach is fun!

W. Brendan Reddy, Intervention Skills: Process Consultation for Small Groups and Teams (San Diego: Pfeiffer & Co., 1994)

Group leaders and process facilitators will find this introduction to process consultation a useful guide. The section on intervention dynamic is particularly relevant. Reddy's chapter on "Types and Depth of Interventions" is worth the price of the book.

Jerry Rhodes, Conceptual Toolmaking: Expert Systems of the Mind (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Business, 1991)

How do you make decisions? What issues do you consider? Do you consider the "hard thinks" as well as the "soft thinks"? The metaphor of creating tools to think has enormous power. Rhodes provides a number of examples: Pattern of Description, Thinks – A Vocabulary for Thinking, Orientation Map, Selling Map, Sort Out Level Checklist, and a Generic Checklist.

Roger M. Schwartz, The Skilled Facilitator: Practical Wisdom for Developing Effective Groups (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994)

Many consider this work to be the ultimate textbook on process consultation. Schwartz describes the theory of process consultation in an easily understandable manner. He offers checklists and suggestions that a new or experienced consultant could use.

Edgar H. Schein, Process Consultation Revisited: Building the Helping Relationship (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1998)

This is the latest edition to the Ed Schein's well-loved set of process consultation books. This new volume builds on the content of the two that precede it and explores the critical area of the helping relationships. Process Consultation Revisited focuses on the interaction between the consultant and client, explaining how to achieve the healthy helping relationship. Drawing on over 40 years of experience as a consultant, Schein creates a general theory and methodology of helping that will enable a diverse group of readers to navigate the helping process successfully.

Peter Senge, Art Kleiner, Richard Ross, Charlotte Roberts, and Bryan Smith, The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization (New York: Doubleday, 1994)

According to Senge, the core of a learning organization is built on Personal Mastery, Mental Models, Shared Vision, Team Learning, and Systems Thinking. The VA High Performance Development Model is also based on these foundation principles. The subtitle, Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization, accurately describes what you will find in the book. This is the type of book that you need to read, mark up, go back to, reread sections, and recommend to others. Don't skip the margin notes.

Peter Senge, Art Kleiner, Richard Ross, Charlotte Roberts, Richard Ross, George Roth and Bryan Smith, The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations (New York: Doubleday, 1999)

Sequels are not as generally as good as the first work. This is an exception! In fact, this sequel may be better.

David Straker, Rapid Problem Solving with Post-It Notes (Tucson: Fisher Books, 1997)

This ingenious little book describes how to use Post-It notes to help groups solve problems. Straker describes a basic problem solving technique in the first part of this book. He then describes with numerous illustration how to Post-up, Swap Sort, use a Top-down and Bottom-up Tree, and create an Information and Action Map. Don't be fooled by the simple graphics.

Robert H. Schaffer, High-Impact Consulting: How Clients and Consultants Can Leverage Rapid Results into Long-Term Gains (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998 0

Schaffer offers a new model for consulting services that will help both consultants and their clients understand the power of speed, flexibility, and responsiveness. "High-Impact Consulting" carries great insights in the psychology and sociology of managing and developing an organization and its co-workers.